


THE EYE SHIELD



Issue 53

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MESSAGE FROM ME

Welcome to issue 53 of The Eye Shield. Those of you with the eyes of a hawk will have noticed that the TES index page for the new issues has recently gone through a thorough overhaul, meaning that you can now read about some of the articles that are in each issue before you click on the links. That's cutting edge stuff, you must admit. Happily, the overhaul also means that you will be able to access each new issue from the index page on the first day of every other month, as well as from the relevant section of the forum. Speaking of the forum, don't forget to post in the TES section if you get even the slightest urge to do so whilst reading this issue or any other, and remember that you can check out the TES index at any time for all your Nightmare team, character, puzzle, creature and book needs.

In this issue, *The Audio Play's the Thing* has more fascinating behind-the-scenes insights into *Famous For Retreating*, as cast members Alec Downs and Sue McPherson share with us some of their audio play recording experiences. I'd like to thank Alec and Sue once again for their participation in this article, and to thank HStorm for organising the interviews, as well as for bringing the audio plays into being. Hopefully this feature will make a triumphant return in a future issue - stay tuned to the forum for any news about future audio plays.

On the reader contributions front, I'm happy to say that things are still looking very healthy indeed, and there are a few more reader articles to come over the next few issues. This issue, Chris Lunn continues the tale of Pickle's dangerous quest towards the Forbidden Level in *The Forbidden Fear*, while Jim Waterman presents his incredibly detailed analysis of the three life force clocks, which I guarantee will tell you things you never knew you didn't ever realise you didn't know! In addition to these two tantalising treats, Jim's Arctic-dwelling pal Jón Þórsteinn Petúrssón presents the second chapter of the epic *Scandinavian Nightmares*, which carries a public health warning and, due to its content, really should not be read by... well, anyone, really. But go on, read it anyway - you'll laugh, I promise!

Elsewhere, Rosey Collins presents more of her '90s kids' show memories in *Kids' TV Shows I Grew Up With*; I present more of my childhood memories in *Those Nightmare Nights: The Eleventh Hour*; *Nightmare Locations* takes you on a train journey from London to Norwich; and

Creature Feature returns with the lowdown on the oracles. Yes, readers, you're in for a treat, but first it's time for a quick rummage through the old mailbag.

We start as usual with a few words from Ross Thompson. Readers, don't forget to check out Ross's Raven-based fanzine, *The Raven's Eye*, at www.freewebs.com/ravenseyemag on the first day of each month.

I really enjoyed reading issue 52 – it was a great read as usual! I always thought that the Conveyor Belt was a bit pointless, but I suppose having this version gave us more of a shock when the blades first appeared because we weren't expecting them. *Knightmare Family Fortunes* was possibly my favourite part of the magazine – I really enjoyed doing these! I managed to get both the car and the £5000 on both parts, of course, but I think it was really cleverly done. I always like *Poetry Corner*; the rhyming is good fun! *Scandinavian Nightmares* was very funny – I love the way they outwitted Granitas!

Thanks as ever from the bottom of my heart for your comments, Ross. I still remember seeing the first blade in the Corridor of Blades for the first time, and having no idea what was going on, yet feeling an excited sense of foreboding. Knightmare was a show second to no other in its ability to excite and enthrall its viewers, which is something it continues to do each time it is introduced to a fresh audience.

Last month, I was very pleased to receive an e-mail from former *Knightmare* RPG star Keith McDonald, who now lives in Switzerland. Here is just some of what he had to say.

I'm a big fan of TES! I'm not as active in the community as I used to be, but I'm good friends with some of your contributors. I'd love to make a contribution of some sort in due course, even if it is about the surrealism of how *Knightmare* helps one to survive in this country.

That's an article I'd certainly love to include in a future issue of TES, Keith, and I'm very glad to know that my efforts are being read and enjoyed even overseas! Thanks a lot for getting in touch.

Here is another e-mail from avid TES reader Rosey Collins of Harpenden.

I've just read your *Remember Him?* about Fidjit, and I agree that it wasn't a very good idea to replace Motley with him, but I have a theory as to why they did it. They obviously kept Motley on in the first place because he was such a great character, even though after series 4 most of the traditional medieval-type characters had disappeared - I think that any jester much less popular than Motley would have been axed at that point. A jester didn't really fit with the new format, and actually Motley doesn't appear in series 6 very much at all - they don't seem to know what to do with him.

I've always said that Motley was just like some funny guy, rather than a jester specifically, so maybe they thought Paul Valentine would be equally good in another role more fitting with the new quest format. Obviously it didn't work, which was why they decided to bring Motley back - but after underusing him in series 6, they must have thought it was worth a try. (Incidentally, I thought it was good of Paul to remember that Motley hadn't seen the new helmet yet, when he reappeared in series 8.)

There was, I suppose, a certain inevitability about Motley's disappearance from the show, as his appearances in series 5 and 6 were distinctly thin on the ground. It was certainly a very pleasant surprise to see him return for series 8, although again he didn't really get the screen-time he deserved, in my opinion. As some of you may remember from one of my Knightmare Top Ten countdowns, Motley's episode spread is second only to Treguard's (he beats Hordriss by three episodes) and yet his episode total is much less impressive – almost one third of his twenty-eight episodes are in series 3 alone! I'm sure the fact that the original concept of his character did not really fit in with the format of series 5-8 is to blame for this, and I think, on the whole, it's a bit of a shame.

I'm sure I don't need to tell you what's coming next - it's the unstoppable bullet train that is Knightmare QI! Here are the answers to Drassil's fiendish brainteasers, followed by those all-important results.

1. What is the only letter of the alphabet never to have been spellcast?

Answer: Q.

Clichés: J, X.

Explanation: J and X are one-offs, but can be found in JOKE and PIXEL. I wonder if any of the spells that were planned but never earned would have contained a Q. A QUICK spell for getting out of Ariadne's Lair in series 4, maybe? QUASH to help Julie beat the goblins in series 3? Ironical that "quest" itself begins with a Q, I suppose.

2. Which of these characters is the odd one out: Sir Hugh, Pixel, the Samurai or Gwendoline? See if you can conjure up the correct answer.

Answer: Gwendoline, as all the others were summoned by spells: Sir Hugh by HERO, Pixel by PIXEL, and the Samurai by SAMURAI.

Cliché: No particular cliché.

3. Excluding winners' trophies, in how many series of Knightmare did frightknights feature?

Answer: 4 (Series 4, 5, 6, and 7).

Cliché: 2 (Series 5 and 6).

Explanation: The answer to this depends entirely on what you class as a frightknight. Lord Fear's frightknights featured in series 5 and 6, and they're also above the Descender doors in series 7, so you could argue that the answer is three. However, Gundrada does refer to the Behemoth as a frightknight in the latter stages of series 4, and seeing as it was in series 3 too, you could argue that the answer is five! However, four is the ideal answer - series 4, 5, 6 and 7 - as the Behemoth was never actually referred to as a frightknight in series 3. Having said that, the only cliché here is two series, i.e. counting series 5 and 6 only.

4. Which of these spells is the odd one out: HERO, HEROES, HOME or WIND?

Answer: HOME, as when all the others were cast, the letters of the spell did not appear on the screen.

Cliché: HERO, because it was the only one not cast as part of a winning quest. HEROES and HOME were not really cast as part of a winning quest either, but were used to dismiss the first four winning teams after they had actually won.

5. Whose pet cat do we see during series 6?

Answer: Nobody's!

Cliché: Sidriss's.

Explanation: We hear Sidriss's cat Bethsemene in series 6, and are told all about her, but we don't actually see her until series 7, with Ben III. Bethsemene is a Cheshire Cat, and therefore prone to invisibility.

6. Which of these is the odd one out: Folly, Merlin, wellways or Lillith? You might want to discuss this question with others at a later date.

Answer: Lillith, as she is the only one not to be mentioned on Nightmare after the final series in which she appeared. Folly was referred to by Treguard during series 3's first quest, and was the answer to one of Golgarach's riddles; Merlin by Brother Mace in series 5, Hordriss in series 6 and Barry in series 7; and wellways by Mace and Elita in series 5.

Cliché: No particular cliché.

7. What does the sequence 7, 15, 15, 12, 14, 13, 14, 15 signify? Finalise your answer.

Answer: Taking the statement "team x was the final team of series y", the sequence comprises x+y for all eight series. So it breaks down as: 6+1, 13+2, 12+3, 8+4, 9+5, 7+6, 7+7 and 7+8.

Cliché: The number of episodes or teams in each series.

8. Who was the first character to mispronounce something in Latin on Nightmare?

Answer: Folly.

Cliché: Brother Mace.

Explanation: Three years before Mace started mispronouncing Latin phrases left, right and centre, Folly used the phrase "alma mater" to rhyme (or half-rhyme at best) with "nature", yet the correct pronunciation of "mater" should rhyme with "barter".

9. Which of these characters is the odd one out: Hordriss, Smirkenorff or Gumboil? As ever, Quite Interesting supplementary information will earn you credit.

Answer: Hordriss, since the others have both been credited in more than one way. During series 1, Gumboil was credited as "Knight", while Smirkenorff was spelt "Smirkenoff" in the series 6 credits.

Cliché: Anything aesthetic, such as numbers of series.

10. How many teams met an "Ooh, nasty!" end in series 4?

Answer: None.

Cliché: All of them.

Explanation: Series 4 is the one and only series in which Treguard does not say "Ooh, nasty!" at all. He says it once each in series 1 and 2 (for deaths, and he also says it during Folly and Cedric's Battle of Insults in series 1), then for most (if not all) deaths in series 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8, but he never says it in series 4.

Rank	Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1	Gehn L	2	2	3	4	3	4	0	4	3	4	29
2	Pooka	1	3	4	3	4	4	1	1	3	3	27
3	Liam C	4	4	10	2	4	2	2	1	3	1	13
4	Keith McD	3	2	2	2	4	2	0	10	3	2	10
5	Joe G-J	1	1	10	3	10	3	1	0	2	1	-8

Congratulations to Gehn "Lex" Luthor for capturing the elusive title of Knightmare QI champion for the first time! Now it's time for Liam Callaghan to complete his trilogy of devious arrays of QI questions by kicking off another round! See if you can wrap your brains around these.

1. What does this sequence signify? RD6, KN13, CS12, GS8, KY9, CS7, BY7, OR7.
2. What do all these characters have in common? HORDRISS, MALICE, LORD FEAR, MRS GRIMWOLD, SYLVESTER HANDS.
3. What do all these characters have in common? BROTHER MACE, MOTLEY, SIDRISS, THE FERRYMAN, RIDOLFO, GRIMALDINE, GREYSTAGG, SYLVESTER HANDS.
4. What have all these characters done during Knightmare's run? LORD FEAR, LISSARD, MILDREAD, HORDRISS, SYLVESTER HANDS, MERLIN, MOGDRED.
5. Which is the odd character out? LORD FEAR, SKARKILL, SYLVESTER HANDS, JULIUS SCARAMONGER, AESANDRE, GREYSTAGG, CAPTAIN NEMANOR, HORDRISS, DREADNORT, HEGGATTY, LISSARD, RAPTOR, GRIMALDINE, BROLLACHAN, SNAPPER-JACK, HONESTY BARTRAM, BHAL-SHEBAH, MALDAME.
6. Who is the odd one out? MERLIN, MOGDRED, GRETTEL, MR & MRS GRIMWOLD, FOLLY.
7. What does this sequence signify? 10, 16, 37, 43, 53, 61, 62, 68.
8. Which of these fatal traps and puzzles is the odd one out? MEDUSA'S STARE, THE DUNGEON VALLEY (QUICKSAND), THE BLOCK AND TACKLE, THE CORRIDOR OF BLADES, CAUSEWAYS, PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT.
9. What does this sequence represent? 1360, 1234, 1240, 0316, 5134, 0135, 0216, 1426.
10. Finally, what does the following sequence represent? You'll have to be "sharp" to get this one. TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT, TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT, TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT, BOTTOM LEFT, BOTTOM RIGHT, BOTTOM RIGHT.

As usual, four points are available for each question - one for supplying the correct answer, one for identifying the cliché (or, in the case of one of these questions, the lack of a cliché) and two for any Quite Interesting supplementary information that is vaguely relevant to the question. E-mail your answers to the address at the foot of the page, or PM them to Eyeshield on the Knightmare Discussion Forum if you prefer,

by Saturday October 18th 2008 and you could be the next Nightmare QI champion. Just imagine how great that would feel! Answers and results will be revealed in issue 54. (By the way, the competition is open from Monday September 1st to Saturday October 18th inclusive, but if you send your answers between Saturday September 6th and Friday September 12th, you should expect some delay in receiving your results as I will be on holiday during that week.)

REMEMBER THIS?

Series 1/2. Level 1.

SIMPLE STARTERS

In series 1, it was common practice to start off each quest with a simple little puzzle in the grey room with four doors, which I'm sure you all know well. The aim of the puzzle was inevitably to open one of the doors, or to discern which door to take, thus ensuring further progress. This was undoubtedly designed to ease the team into their quest with an easy task that was not at all taxing, although judging by the amount of time it took David and his friends to get to grips with their simple starter, this may have been a slight miscalculation. Still, seeing as this was the very first Dungeon room in the very first episode of Knightmare, we mustn't judge David and friends too harshly.

Both David and Maeve had the task of walking on letters to create a word that would open one of the doors, which they both did during the course of the first episode. Consequently, the challenge of walking on letters did not appear again in Knightmare after the very first episode, at least until Ben attempted the Great Causeway in the later part of series 6. David's word was OPEN; Maeve's was SESAME. The next dungeoneer, Simon, had to unite three parts of a golden key, which then opened one of the doors, while Danny's team had the unique experience of choosing between the four doors by means of one of Folly's cryptic riddles.

Helen had a very similar task to Simon's, except the key was not even broken up into pieces this time - one simple step and the door opened! Conversely, Richard had a couple of jobs to do as his simple starter, first by bridging the pit with a metal grille in a different room, then by choosing a symbol to unlock one of the doors in the more traditional starting chamber. This scene featured the first appearance of a Fire Exit, which the team obviously did not want to take. The choice they had was between a simple lock-and-key, the symbol of a bomb and the symbol of a chalice. They chose the chalice, as Treguard told them to look for a sign symbolic of a true quest - the Holy Grail, obviously.

The simple starters made a brief return in series 2, although they were not used with such ruthless regularity, as the programme became more varied in its content and style. The first dungeoneer of the series, Martin, had to choose between the four doors in the traditional starting

chamber, using a clue from Folly to follow Gretel through one of the doors. The second dungeoneer, Claire, also had a choice to make in this room, between the symbols of a skull, an eye, a knight from a chess set, and a Fire Exit. Sensibly, the team chose the knight, although the door did not lead on to Combat Chess, as one might have expected it to.

Here the simple starters pretty much stopped, and the starting chamber became dark blue for the rest of the series, even cropping up in level two on occasion. Akash, Neil, Julian and Anthony all entered the blue starting chamber quite early in level one and had to make a choice about which door to take, which invariably involved avoiding the Fire Exit, but it was a far cry from those nice little puzzles in series 1, which could even be seen as a precursor to puzzles such as the causeways and the rune lock.

Difficulty: 3 Simple starters were simple, on the whole.

Killer Instinct: 0 They would never allow a quest to end this early!

Gore Factor: 0 A simple life force job, I'm sure.

Fairness: 10 A nice little puzzle to ease the team into the quest - nothing to complain about here.

THE AUDIO PLAY'S THE THING

Part Two

Sue McPherson played Heggatty and Majida in *Famous For Retreating*. Now she reveals all to The Eye Shield about her audio play experiences.

THE EYE SHIELD: Do you have a favourite Nightmare series, team, puzzle, character and/or creature?

SUE MCPHERSON: I'm not sure if I have a favourite series as such, but I probably started watching Nightmare regularly from about series 6; a lot of the images from then stick in my mind. As for characters, I'd have to be boring and say Treguard, because without him, there wouldn't be Nightmare. He was the figurehead you respected.

How did your involvement with *Famous For Retreating* come about?

My involvement with Famous for Retreating came about after my role in the seventh season of the Nightmare RPG. I had been introduced to the community by Snowcat, as he is known round the forums. After the RPG, HStorm approached Snowcat and myself and asked if we would take part in a project he was planning. It ended up with the two of us organising accommodation and recording studios for the play itself.

How much say did you have in which characters you played?

I didn't have much say in which characters I was going to play. As it was, the roles chopped and changed a few times. I think at one point I was supposed to be playing Stiletta, but it was a while ago and I have the memory of a goldfish.

How did you prepare for your roles? Did you watch the characters' appearances on *Nightmare* several times, practise into a tape recorder etc, or did you just turn up and say the lines?

I didn't really prepare for my roles too much. I watched a few clips for Heggatty. She has quite an odd accent that I wasn't quite grasping, but I managed to get a feel for how she spoke. My semi-death scene was probably the hardest bit. Usually if I'm faking death, I'm halfway to the floor, but trying to imitate that without moving was a lot more difficult than I realised. It felt very cheesy as well, but that could just be me. With Majida I just turned up, put on a Spanish-sounding accent and had some fun. (I know she isn't Spanish, but it still worked!)

Which characters do you think were pulled off (for want of a better

expression) most effectively in *Famous For Retreating*?

Oh, without a doubt it has to be Skarkill. Alec played him brilliantly. It was so funny, because he couldn't remember fully who he was, but he was fantastic. I remember standing in the studio when Snowcat had been playing about and editing one of Skarkill's scenes. It was when Skarkill is out scouting with Grippa and Rhark and he falls down the hole. Combined with Alec's acting, and the scene enhancements that Snowcat did, it was hysterical, and it gave us our first insight to how the play would sound.

Do you have other acting interests apart from the audio plays?

Absolutely. I've been doing amateur dramatics for a few years now. Oddly I never really got involved with it when I was at school... I was too quiet. But I got involved out of school, through local amateur dramatics groups; mostly this was my dad's influence. I joined L.A.O.S. (Larbert Amateur Operatic Society) and took part in my first show back in 1994 or 1995, with the Scottish story of *Brigadoon*. From that point on, I was hooked. Since then, I've played a pantomime donkey in *Pinocchio*, and *Brigadoon* again a few years later. More recently, I joined a smaller, more local group - Alvadrama - which was an awful lot of fun, since comedy was their preferred style. I was the Bride in *There Goes the Bride* and Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*. I took a break after that, as the RPG was approaching. I played a goblin and Phyllis, who was awesome fun to play. It was very different to play someone with an evil streak. Following that came the audio play.

As Majida you were the only person in the play to leave a very shrewd Treguard lost for words when you sounded him out about sending dungeoneers to do his dirty work. Do you feel proud of this achievement?

Ha-ha. Well, I can't take all the credit since I didn't write the script, but it was fun being mouthy to Treguard.

Do you plan to be involved with future audio plays?

I would like to be involved in future projects, or any other Knightmare-related project, for that matter.

Do you have any other comments you'd like to make or interesting/amusing stories you'd like to share about the audio plays, Knightmare or even The Eye Shield?

I think the only story I can recall of any particular amusement was a slip of the tongue from Eleanor, who introduced Greystagg as Grayskull, and

proceeded to shout "By the Power of Grayskull!" I'm sure it's on recording somewhere, as everyone burst out laughing and struggled to keep a straight face for the rest of the afternoon.

I just have to say, I think the Knightmare community is great. Without it, I wouldn't have met some of the funniest, nicest people I know. I don't think I could have found the kindness and love that I have been met with since joining the community, from anywhere else. I've been welcomed in with open arms from almost everyone that I have met so far, and I want to say thanks to everyone for making me feel like one of the family.

Also, thanks to The Eye Shield for inviting me to do this interview. It's great to know that people are interested in what made *Famous For Retreating* what it is.

Thank you, Sue. Next up it's Alec Downs, who played Skarkill and Merlin in *Famous For Retreating*.

THE EYE SHIELD: Do you have a favourite Knightmare series, team, puzzle, character and/or creature?

ALEC DOWNS: Series 3 was probably my favourite. The minecart ride between levels took me right back to *Indiana Jones*. That and the Sinclair competition made it stand out for me because I started playing *The Hobbit* on my Spectrum around the same time.

How did your involvement with *Famous For Retreating* come about?

I'd grown up with Russell and Martin (Treguard and Lord Fear in *FRR*) and we were all fans of Knightmare. When Martin offered me a part, I jumped at the chance.

How much say did you have in which characters you played?

Being involved from the beginning, I pretty much had free rein over which parts I played, as I recall.

How did you prepare for your roles? Did you watch the characters' appearances on *Knightmare* several times, practise into a tape recorder etc, or did you just turn up and say the lines?

It had been a while since I'd last seen Knightmare, so I watched a few episodes to reacquaint myself with the characters, especially Skarkill, and I recited my lines to myself in various accents before we came to record. I was afraid of becoming *too prepared*, if that makes any sense -

I felt that if I stuck too rigidly to any preconceived notions then I'd stumble and generally sound unnatural.

Which characters do you think were pulled off (for want of a better expression) most effectively in *Famous For Retreating*?

While I think everyone did really well, I would have to say that Stiletta (Eleanor Booth-Davey) and Lord Fear (Martin Odoni) pulled off their roles wonderfully. Eleanor's mellifluous tones gave her character real depth, and Martin's portrayal of Lord Fear conveyed just the right amount of hate-filled bile that was needed.

Do you have other acting interests apart from the audio plays?

Not really. Other than a couple of school plays and *FFR*, I've not really done much. I like the idea of doing voice acting, though, probably because I have a face for radio.

Do you like Merlin on the actual show and if so, did you find it hard to play him as a complete doddery old fool?

I thought John Woodnutt's take on Merlin was excellent. Merlin is normally portrayed on TV and in films as the wise old sage, never as an aging wizard with impending senility. That said, I did struggle for a while with playing him as a complete doddery old fool, as you put it. It was a bit of a struggle to pull off the old man voice as well. In the end I used Richard Vernon's portrayal of Slartibartfast in *The Hitch Hikers' Guide to the Galaxy* as inspiration.

Do you plan to be involved with future audio plays?

I live in Australia now, so it's nigh-on impossible for me to return to the studio for any future plays, but there's always the possibility of recording remotely and sending a part over.

Do you have any other comments you'd like to make or interesting/amusing stories you'd like to share about the audio plays, *Knightmare* or even *The Eye Shield*?

One funny moment comes to mind. One of the engineers at the SAE Institute where we recorded the play was probably not used to the level of concentrated geekery that we brought to the studio. After a couple of days, he made a post on the Lonely Planet forum about how he'd never worked with people like us before, but was having a good time of it. It read a bit like an anthropologist's field notes on encountering an unknown tribal village. Other than that, I'd just say I had a marvellous time and

that it was great to be involved in producing some new content for the Knightmare community.

Thank you, Alec.

ADVENTURE TIME

As the never-ending journey continues, the Dungeon leads 15-6, and dungeoneer Gemma has just landed in level two.

Gemma finds herself in a blue cave with a raised rectangular block, which contains several items.

"There's a scroll, a red gem, a green gem and a key," Gemma tells her advisors.

"Read the scroll," one of them instructs.

"Only one colour will be your salvation; the other spells your downfall," Gemma reads out. *"In this case, it pays to be naïve."*

"This is a decision you must take, team," Treguard tells them. "Make sure you heed the words of the scroll!"

The advisors decide to take the green gem instead of the red, and Gemma also takes the key.

She is directed out of the cave, into the rock-strewn courtyard of a ruined castle. A rope is hanging down from somewhere high above, and Elita is climbing down it. When she sees Gemma, she storms over and prods the dungeoneer in the chest.

"Oi, face-ache!" Elita snaps. "Get lost, will you? I've come here for a bit of peace and quiet - the last thing I want is a noisy, smelly dungeoneer getting in the way!"

"Yes, I see Elita's language is just as foul as ever," Treguard chuckles. "But I'm sure she could help you in your quest, if you could persuade her..."

"I've got a green stone here," Gemma tells Elita. "If you give me some information, you can have it."

"If you've got a green stone, you'll know that it's completely useless except to elves," Elita retorts, "so you might as well just hand it over and then push off and leave me in peace!"

"I'm taking this with me unless you help me," Gemma says teasingly, holding the stone close to her.

"Humph," Elita grumps. "All right, then. Hand it over, and I'll tell you something very useful."

The team agrees that Elita can be trusted to keep her word, so Gemma hands over the green stone.

"Okay, face-ache, you can push off now!" Elita snaps. "But you might want to remember that the third step is the sheep. Now, hop it!"

Elita shoves the green stone into her waistband and begins to climb back

up the rope. As Gemma is directed towards a doorway in the top right-hand corner of the courtyard, a whirring noise suddenly fills the room, and the Automatum clanks into view, heading straight for Gemma, with his morning star raised menacingly.

"Quickly, team!" Treguard urges. "The Automatum will show Gemma no mercy if he catches up with her!"

The advisors tell Gemma to speed up; she reaches the exit quite safely.

She emerges into a grand throne chamber, where a large pit spans the floor before her.

"You have reached a place of magic, team," Treguard points out, "but that magic may be denied you unless you take the right steps to reach it." The advisors decide that animal noises are called for here, so Gemma is forced to whinny, snort and then bleat in order to create the path. Once all three paving stones are in place, Gemma reaches the magic symbol. Lightning flashes, and Merlin appears on the throne.

"Ah, congratulations, Gemma," the wizard beams warmly. "I can see that your farmyard noises are up to scratch, but I wonder if your wits are in a similar state. To find out, I shall ask two truths of you, and I must have both if you are to receive my magical aid. Here is the first. What creature has the head and wings of an eagle, and the body of a horse?"

The advisors all know the answer to this, as they have both read and watched *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* many times. They tell Gemma what to say.

"A hippogriff," she tells Merlin.

"Truth accepted," he replies with a smile. "Here is the second. What creature has the head of a lion, and the body and tail of a scorpion?"

The advisors are less sure of their ability to answer this one, but Gemma manages to dredge the answer from somewhere in her memory.

"A mantichore," she says.

"Truth accepted," Merlin smiles warmly. "Well done indeed, Gemma. Your reward is called CURE, and you should already know what it does. Remember, it is a universal remedy to any ailment, but be careful how you use it. On your way, now; good luck to you."

Merlin disappears in another flash of lightning, and Gemma is directed out of the room.

She finds herself in a red room with a grand archway as the only exit, above which hangs a stag's head. There is also a table in the room, at which Hordriss the Confuser is slumped, apparently asleep.

"Well, it's not like Hordriss to be caught napping," Treguard chuckles. "I

wonder what he's up to."

"I am not napping!" Hordriss slurs incoherently, raising his head slightly from the table. "I was just performing a particularly tricky spell, and it's taken a lot out of me. I'll be fine in a few minutes, though... just fine..."

With that, Hordriss collapses into unconsciousness. The advisors discuss their plan of action. Despite the fact that Merlin has warned them to be careful when using his magical gift, they decide that there really is only one thing to do in this situation.

"Spellcasting:" says the spellcaster. "C-U-R-E."

At once, Hordriss wakes up with a start and rises to his feet. He strides over to Gemma and shakes her warmly by the hand.

"Oh, thank you, young person," Hordriss says enthusiastically. "I really needed that..."

Hordriss then remembers himself, and calms down a little.

"That is to say, I am grateful for your assistance in this matter, even though I would have been quite able to revive myself, given time," he coughs embarrassedly. "However, I believe in paying debts that are owed, so I will reward you for your kindness. I gift you with the spell GRIP, which I think you will find most useful."

With that, Hordriss flounces out of the chamber. The advisors direct Gemma out through the large archway, into a high-vaulted room that has a large metal door on the far wall.

The door is locked with a golden keyhole. As the advisors begin to take Gemma forward, a familiar whirring sound fills the room, and the Automatum clanks into view just behind Gemma.

"Quick, run forwards!" cries one advisor.

"Hold the key up in front of you!" adds another.

Gemma manages to unlock the door and run into the Descender before the Automatum can catch up with her. The large mechanical device grinds into life, and carries Gemma down the red-bricked shaft until it reaches a floor with two unmarked doors, where it comes to a halt. Between the two doors, an evil face appears on the wall, staring down at Gemma from between the writhing strands of its snake-filled hair.

"Extreme warning, team, Medusa has managed to infiltrate the Descender!" Treguard exclaims. "You may have reached level three, but if you don't want Gemma to be stuck there forever as a statue, you'd better take action now!"

"Spellcasting:" says the spellcaster. "G-R-I-P!"

Medusa's stone stare is frozen solid. The advisors quickly direct Gemma towards the right-hand door, through which she exits, into level three.

Does *Gemma* have what it takes to meet the ultimate challenge? Read the next *Adventure Time* to find out.

PUZZLE PAGE ONE

You're in a Room...

All these quotes come from advisors, who are trying to describe a room or puzzle to their dungeoneer. See if you can identify the puzzle or room and the dungeoneer, but not the name of the individual advisor - as I've said before, that'd be going too far!

- 1.) "Underneath you there's, like, all worms."
- 2.) "In front of you there is a dropping, where you can drop down."
- 3.) "Quickly, _____, because the pieces are dropping off!"
- 4.) "You're in a room that seems to have a roof made out of a spider's web."
- 5.) "Stop... dead! You are on a very, very thin ledge; it's extremely thin."
- 6.) "There are three sections... three rows of floor, and the three in between are moving."
- 7.) "You are in a corridor and there's four rooms... four corridors... tut!... I mean, four exits!"
- 8.) "You're in a room that looks a bit like a kitchen."
- 9.) "You're on, like, an escalator... but it's not going up, it's going forwards."
- 10.) "You're on, like, a short little strip of pathway leading out to a revolving disc."

THE FORBIDDEN FEAR

By Chris Lunn

Pickle landed with a dull thud in the clearing. His eyes darted feverishly around, looking for an escape route before Skarkill could clap his irons on him.

"Lovely! His Fearship will be pleased," Skarkill laughed throatily.

Skarkill leant down to attach his irons. Suddenly a figure darted out from the trees behind him.

"Unhand that elf and leave this wood at once!"

A woman clad all in green emerged, bow drawn and arrow nocked. Skarkill spun round as if shot in the posterior.

"Do not interfere in his Lordship's business. He is a very powerful enemy, wench!"

"Never refer to me as *wench*, Goblin Master! My name is Gwendoline and I am the Green Warden of these woods." She loosed the arrow towards Rhark, who fled for the safety of the bushes, and immediately nocked another. "Now, I will not ask you again - leave these woods or become a man-sized pincushion!"

Deciding that running might be a good idea, Skarkill fled, shouting over his shoulder, "This isn't over, elf! We'll be back."

While this exchange was taking place, Pickle took the opportunity to hide in a tall tree. Peering down through the branches, he found Gwendoline looking straight up at him.

"You can come down now, elf; the way is safe for now."

Pickle scrambled down the tree. "Thank you, Madam Green Warden." Suddenly realising something, he asked, "Just out of curiosity, what are you doing here?"

Gwendoline frowned, deep in thought, and then answered, "I will answer all your questions when we get out of this wood and into the inn at

Wolfenden."

Arriving in Wolfenden, Pickle and Gwendoline looked around in amazement. There were children playing in the street, followed by chickens; stallholders were selling all kinds of wares; and there were shops of all sorts. Advancing down the street, Pickle found himself separated from Gwendoline by the crowd. Suddenly a hand came down his shoulder.

"Hello, young elf, can I be of service?"

Pickle found himself confronted by a man dressed in a yellow doublet and a red waistcoat, with a long beard and strange hat to top off the ensemble. The man extended his hand.

"Julius Scaramonger, at your service. And what's your fancy today, friend?"

"He'll buy nothing from you today, con artist!" said Gwendoline's voice from just behind him.

"Thank you again, Green Warden," said Pickle.

"Your thanks are not necessary, and please call me Gwendoline."

Arriving in the local pub, Gwendoline guided Pickle to a vacant table in the corner.

"Now that we can talk in relative safety, I will tell you all I know." Pickle leant forward in his chair, his ears pricked. "When Treguard was sent to the Forbidden Level, the Dungeon was massively ruptured and reorganised. New creatures and beings were freed into the Dungeon, including that odious Scaramonger, Skarkill and myself. The four quest objects were scattered between the three levels. Treguard was able to retrieve one, although I have no knowledge as to which it was."

"Did you speak to Treguard before you were freed?" asked Pickle.

"Yes, I was fortunate to encounter him as I left, and he told me of the only way to close the rupture and free him."

"Which is?"

"Gather the other three quest objects and bring them to the rupture," said Gwendoline. "I have managed to acquire the quest object from level one and I will give it to you. I will also see you safely to the end of this level, but I cannot pass any further. There will be others such as myself who will be only too glad to help you, but also people who will seek to mislead and capture you."

"Wait a minute!" broke in Pickle. "Treguard expects me, an elf, to continue this quest? Surely there must be someone else!"

"If there was, do you think he would send you?"

Pickle sat back, taking in this sudden burst of information. "Okay, so where do I go from here?"

"We must head across the causeway to the Descender, which will take you to level two. If we are to go we must go now, Pickle, before Skarkill reports back to Lord Fear. We must leave by the back door."

Gwendoline stood up and Pickle followed her, keeping to the shadows as they approached the back door. Gwendoline threw it open and stepped through the portal. Pickle looked around. The path seemed to go on forever, with a single door to the left and a rock with a loaf of bread and a spyglass on it. He approached the rock and split the loaf in two, giving half to Gwendoline and keeping half for himself.

"Look into the spyglass, Pickle; we may get an idea of how far behind us the Opposition is," said Gwendoline.

Pickle picked up the spyglass and looked into it. As he put it to his eye, the grim visage of Lord Fear appeared. He was talking into his crystal ball, whilst his frightknights roamed around behind him.

"What do you mean he got away, Skarkill?" Lord Fear demanded. "He's an elf, not Houdini!"

Skarkill's face appeared in the crystal ball. "Sorry, your Fearship, sir. It was that woman, Gwendoline. She fired at Rhark and Grippa and threatened to turn me into a pincushion!"

Lord Fear's eyes turned red with frustration. "Well I suggest you find him! Try the causeway and report back." Skarkill's reply was cut off by a low hum from the castle's security system. "Excuse me, Skarkill, but our elf friend is using a spyglass. Now I'll find out where you are, little man!"

Pickle dropped the spyglass in fear and turned to face Gwendoline.

"I think we had better be going," said Gwendoline.

"Agreed," replied Pickle.

As they strode towards the door, a low rumble shook the floor and a blocker raced toward them, blocking the entrance to the causeway. The blocker (one of the ugliest of the Dungeon denizens) was nothing more than a moving, talking wall.

"PASSWORD!" it croaked.

"I haven't got one!" exclaimed Pickle.

"We'll use mine," said Gwendoline calmly. Turning to the blocker, she replied, "Leaf mould."

The blocker thought for a minute and then retreated. They ran for the door and arrived in a large room, with a door at one end and a hexagonally tiled floor. The causeway had decided (as it was occasionally prone to) to change the pictures that it showed. Today it had decided on a pattern of shields and swords.

"Watch your step, Pickle, and tread only as I do," Gwendoline instructed.

They edged cautiously out onto the tiles, making certain not to step on any marked with a sword. With a grinding sound, the tiles behind them started to fall.

"Faster, Gwendoline!" exclaimed Pickle.

They barely reached the door before the last tile fell with a crash to the floor. Arriving in front of the Descender, Gwendoline quickly gave Pickle some last-minute advice.

"Remember, Pickle, trust no one unless they bear the seal of Treguard," she said.

"Thank you, friend Green Warden," said Pickle.

"Before I go, here is the quest object of level one; the Cup that Heals." Handing Pickle the Cup, Gwendoline smiled. "Farewell, friend Pickle."

As Gwendoline made her way to the portal, Pickle approached the Descender. Standing in the middle of the great device, Pickle shouted "Down!" and started the descent into level two.

Will Pickle make it through the second level, and progress further towards his goal of releasing Treguard from the Forbidden Level? Stay tuned for the third chapter of this adventure to find out.

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 8

Quest: The Shield.

Dungeoneer: Rebecca Hughes.

Advisors: Natalie, Julie and Emma.

Home towns: Dorchester and Weymouth, Dorset.

Team score: 4 out of 10.

Rebecca was the last dungeoneer ever to die on Nightmare, and also the last one to attempt level two. Let's not get bogged down in the reasons for this, but simply take a look at the details of the quest.

Level One: The quest begins in a large sewer pipe, which turns out to be a short cut to the clue room. The presence of a firestone on the table causes Treguard and Majida to start going on about how they haven't seen Smirkenorff for a while, and the clues from the scroll make it quite plain that Rebecca is due to meet Smirkenorff pretty soon, for which she will need a horn to wake him and a firestone to feed him. Rebecca takes these two objects, and also looks through a spyglass. Lord Fear is instructing Sylvester Hands to dress up as Brother Strange and give Rebecca the wrong combination for the rune lock, but he eventually decides to do this himself, as Hands does not really understand what he is supposed to do.

The new-look dwarf tunnels follow, where Brother Strange - the real one - is waiting for Rebecca. He tells her the combination to the rune lock - also the real one - in exchange for a proverb. Rebecca then arrives at Smirkenorff's pit, and she wakes him up by blowing the horn. Although the advisors are obviously expecting a flight, which is not an unreasonable assumption, they soon realise that Smirkenorff's role is now to give out information, so they swap the firestone for a spell called SPEED. This is required in Fireball Alley, where the fireballs are coming out of the wall at a much greater speed than normal. Smirkenorff's spell slows down the fireballs (rather than speeding Rebecca up, as its name suggests it should) and the team complete the challenge with no real problems, although the approach of some goblins adds a bit of tension to the scene.

Rebecca next meets Lord Fear in his Brother Strange disguise, and she gives him the same proverb as she gave the real Brother Strange. He is very grateful for this, and rewards Rebecca with a FLOAT spell in

addition to the wrong combination for the rune lock. This long-promised puzzle makes an appearance in the next room, and Majida demands to know how the team can tell which of the two Brothers Strange is the real one(!) The advisors explain how they know that the first one was the real one, and then they use his code to clear the runes from the doorway. (Of course, if they had started to use the wrong code, they would have realised very quickly and could then have used the right one instead - not one of Lord Fear's best plans, I feel.)

Again, goblins can be heard approaching, and two of the little critters appear in the chamber just as Rebecca manages to open the door. This sends the advisors into a complete panic, and they start sending Rebecca all over the place, shouting and screaming at her hysterically - what a farce! Eventually, she manages to get out through the door, and into the trapdoor room. Two skeletrons are on guard, but the Reach wand soon opens the trapdoor, and Lord Fear's FLOAT spell ensures that Rebecca is able to fall safely into level two.

Level Two: Rebecca lands in one of the corridors of Goth, where there is a clue table waiting for her. The objects on offer are a spanner, a bar of gold and a bottle of Fireball Brandy; while the scroll makes it quite clear that the spanner will be required, the choice of the second object is a fifty-fifty chance, and unfortunately the team plump for the wrong one - the gold. A spyglass shows Lissard and Maldame plotting to overthrow Lord Fear, but it turns out that Lord Fear and Lissard are in league and are attempting to use Maldame to turn both Rebecca and herself into skeletrons by having them both touch a magic wand at the same time.

Doubtless Rebecca would have later met Maldame and attempted to rectify this situation, but she never gets the chance. She meets Snapper-Jack in the Sewers of Goth, and the team just about manage to scrape two correct answers, but they are living on borrowed time, and the end awaits them in the next room. Rebecca enters a corridor that is completely blocked by miremen, and she walks right into one of them! Treguard explains that the Fireball Brandy was required to defeat the miremen.

Summary: They panicked far too much and were never likely to do very well, although they coped with their level one challenges fairly competently, and were floored simply by the lack of a clue to help them choose their second level two object.

CREATURE FEATURE

Series 2/3. Level 2.

ORACLES

If you settle down to read a spot of *Greek Mythology*, you may just come across an oracle or two. It is a mysterious creature, often taking the form of a veiled woman, which spends most of its time making portents and imparting great knowledge to the world in general. Knightmare's oracles performed much the same function, but they appeared as incandescent, ethereal faces on the wall of the level two clue room, rather than as robed women. Having said that, the oracles in both series were undoubtedly female, and the one in series 2 did appear to be wearing a hood or veil of some kind, in keeping with the Greek style.

To hear the words of an oracle, the dungeoneer would have to close their eyes tightly and raise the Helmet of Justice slightly above their head. This caused the mysterious creature's serene singing to change into discernable words, but the advisors would have to listen very carefully to what the oracle was saying, as there was no order to its limitless knowledge, for it did not rate any one fact (such as the third step) as being more important than any other (such as a recipe for some kind of stew).

Series 2 can boast but one oracle appearance, with Audrey Jenkinson (more often seen playing Gretel in this series) taking on the role of the Oracle of Confusion. Upon entering the level two clue room, Tony was presented with the choice of a scroll, a bar of soap and a gauntlet, and the words of the Oracle of Confusion (amongst its other ramblings) told him which items to take. Unfortunately, the advisors did not listen carefully enough, as they were supposed to "accept the challenge". They did not take the gauntlet, choosing the soap instead, which would apparently "cleanse, but not the spirit", which led to the team's downfall soon after.

In series 3, there were more oracle appearances, with Zoe "Mellisandre" Loftin taking on the role of the Oracle. Actually, the Oracle appeared on three separate occasions during series 3, but there is nothing concrete to suggest that the three oracles were actually the same entity; indeed, each one looked slightly different from the other two. On each of the three occasions, the vital information in amongst the Oracle's ramblings

was one of the steps for Merlin's throne room - the third step for Martin and Leo, and the second for Scott. Leo also had to pick up on a clue about turning left when faced with death, which turned out to be when he met some goblins in the Corridor of the Catacombs.

So, that's oracles for you. Undoubtedly their appearances were infrequent and somewhat forgettable, but I think they're rather a nice touch, and they certainly fit in well with the eerie, slightly sinister atmosphere of the early series.

Fear Factor: 3 Obviously not a threat, but maybe a little unnerving.

Killer Instinct: 2 Not on purpose, but missing a clue proved costly for Tony.

Gore Factor: 1 Calm, serene and very soothing, actually.

Humanity: 7 They had human faces, at the very least.

THOSE NIGHTMARE NIGHTS: The Eleventh Hour

Have you ever heard it said that the darkest hour is just before dawn? Even though this is a complete lie, as the sky is normally tinged with a rather attractive shade of dark blue just before dawn, it does describe very nicely the way I used to feel on Friday afternoons (or, indeed, Monday afternoons in the very early days) as I waited for the school day to end and Nightmare to begin. The thought of Nightmare waiting for me at the end used to sustain me throughout the week, but mustering the patience to get through that one final afternoon was sometimes the hardest thing in the world, particularly on the not infrequent occasions when circumstances conspired to make it the worst afternoon of the week.

In the Autumn Term of 1987, I hadn't even started school. Ah, those glorious days! Watching children's television with my mother was always a favourite occupation, and Nightmare quickly became the highlight of my week. I used to eat quite a lot of Shreddies in those days (I still do, actually) and I remember that, at the time, packets of Shreddies would have a kind of spooky board game on the back, which I would play by myself with a counter from a game of Snakes and Ladders we had, pretending that the back of the Shreddies packet was the Nightmare Dungeon and the counter was the dungeoneer. Before I sent the intrepid dungeoneer on his way, I would always say out loud "The only way is onwards, there is no turning back." I've always remembered that.

In September 1988, I had been at school for five months. Despite having wet myself on my first day, I don't think I found the whole thing too distressing, but doubtless the thought of Nightmare in the evening would help me through those dreary Mondays. At one point, I came out of school at the end of the day looking rather depressed, and my mum attempted to cheer me up by reminding me that Nightmare was on that evening. Unfortunately, in order to do this, she felt the need to declare "I am Igneous of Legend!" very loudly in the middle of the playground, which was packed with parents and children. Most embarrassing!

It was in 1988, of course, that I was forced to watch one episode of Nightmare at a neighbour's house while my mum took Rosey to the doctor. I can still vividly remember this neighbour shooing her two young children out of their own living room so that I could watch Nightmare in

peace, and then presenting me with something nice to eat in a bowl - I can't remember what it was, but it was definitely warm and gloopy. I've always remembered this event, and been thankful to my neighbour for facilitating it. If you're reading this, Fran, thanks a million!

In September 1989, Nightmare moved to Friday for the first time. I was in Year Two. It was then that my goal became to make it through the week just so that I could watch Nightmare at the end, and it kept me going nicely. I don't have any particular memories about the Eleventh Hour in those days, but I'm sure I was clock-watching all afternoon, even though I couldn't completely tell the time yet!

When September 1990 rolled around, I had just started Year Three, and had therefore become a Junior! This was quite a daunting prospect, I assure you. Still, I liked my Year Three teacher and I got on very well in her class, but what made waiting for Nightmare even more exciting and nerve-wracking was that I would be able to record it for the first time, and watch it again whenever I wanted! Unlike most people in the country, who had been the proud and happy owners of a VCR (unless it was a Betamax) for the best part of ten years, it took my household until the summer of 1990 to acquire one. So it was that, from series 4 onwards, I managed to record every episode of Nightmare... well, pretty much.

I spent Years Four and Five in the same classroom, and also in the same seat. This seat had a very good view of a clock that was mounted on the wall just outside the classroom, which had no door, and every afternoon I would watch the final minutes and seconds before three-fifteen ticking away, sometimes at an agonisingly slow rate. Never was the clock's progress slower than on a Friday afternoon in the Autumn Term, when I had, as usual, only one goal - to get home and watch Nightmare!

As I have mentioned before, it was in September 1993 that I found I *really* needed Nightmare in order to stop me from throwing myself off the school roof on a Friday afternoon! I was in Year Six now, and so I was being taught by the dreaded Year Six teacher, whose name had always been whispered with fear and loathing throughout the school. I mentioned this teacher and her shortcomings in issue 26, so I won't bore you with the details again, but I will remind you that one of her most dreaded lessons was PE, which she treated like a particularly harsh Army training scheme. For us poor, frightened little Year Sixes, Friday afternoons meant Games, and Games meant you were going to wish you

were dead before the clock struck three! I myself have never been athletically blessed (although I was quite handy with a Rounders bat at one point, and I was an absolute demon on Third Post) so you can imagine my dismay at the prospect of sprinting around the sizeable sports field at the back of a group of six and overtaking all five of my companions when the teacher yelled "Sprint!" in her hysterical, piercing voice. Don't get me wrong - I'm all for a nice bit of PE as part of a well-rounded school day. However, I still maintain that overtaking five older, faster opponents all running at full tilt is not humanly possible!

This is just one of the ridiculous things she made us do, but there were others, most of which I have tried to forget all about. Without Nightmare to look forward to at the end of these soul-destroying activities, I honestly believe I would have gone stark-raving mad, or at least burst into tears. My three closest friends and companions through the prison sentence that was Year Six were called Amy, Jennifer and Hannah - yes, they were all girls, but I wasn't! I remember talking with them about Nightmare on a few occasions, but none of them watched it as avidly as I did. This was the closest I ever came to talking endlessly about Nightmare with my friends at school, as so many Nightmare fans remember doing with such fondness. I always feel I missed out on something there. Still, I remember that little gang with affection, and sometimes feel a twinge of sadness when I remember how conflicting secondary school places (and maybe the unfortunate inevitability of growing older) put an end to it.

Speaking of secondary school, that's where I was in September 1994, just starting out on a journey that would last until June 2001 and result in ten GCSEs and three-and-a-half A Levels. The beginning of that journey was very nerve-wracking for one of my sensitive and shy disposition, although I enjoyed Year Seven a lot more than Year Six, it has to be said. Friday afternoons, however, were a bit of a bummer - I had Music and then Art. Please rest assured that I have nothing against these subjects per se, and I know they can both be very enjoyable and satisfying for many people. However, I am not one of these people. Possessing no natural aptitude in either subject, and enjoying neither of them, I found Friday afternoons, once again, a bit of a drag.

The Music department at my secondary school was headed by a rather stern man, who could not seem to understand that some people were naturally better at his subject than others. (He was actually a very

approachable, sympathetic teacher, as long as you avoided the subject of Music.) Fortunately, he wasn't teaching my class, but he was always lurking outside the classroom, staring daggers through the small glass panel in the door if you struck the wrong bar on the glockenspiel. I didn't like that much.

The Art department at my secondary school was headed by another rather stern man, who also could not seem to understand that some people were naturally better at his subject than others. Again, he wasn't actually teaching my class, but he was teaching another Year Seven class next door, and he kept popping in to see what we were doing, which I don't think our real teacher (a brusque little woman who also taught me Textiles, in the most incomprehensible manner you can imagine) liked very much. I may have enjoyed Year Seven Art more if we had been allowed to use some materials other than pencil and paper, but we didn't see a drop of paint or a splat of clay all year! In the next room, the head of the department was using all kinds of wonderful materials with the other class, but he obviously never suggested that any of them were brought through to us!

Oh my good God, I was glad to get home after that devil of an afternoon! I used to race home in just under ten minutes (the journey would normally take fifteen, at my normal cruising speed) in order to arrive just in time for The Spooks of Bottle Bay, which would be followed by Astro Farm and, eventually, Nightmare - hallelujah!

Of course, there was one Friday when I didn't have to endure Music and Art in the afternoon, or indeed double Textiles between break and lunch, because the whole school went on a sponsored walk around Harpenden instead! I've never been so knackered in all my life, even after accompanying forty nine-to-eleven-year-olds to Scarborough for a week in May 2004. Never was I so glad to have Nightmare to look forward to - I can still remember watching episode 4 of series 8 in an exhausted heap, with my feet (each of which was playing host to several large blisters) in a bowl of warm water, and thinking to myself, thank God it's over!

Of course, after 1994, there were no more Nightmare Nights. I could have done with them, though - I had German and then Maths on Friday afternoons in Year Eight, which was hardly a relaxing end to the week. When I was in Year Nine, we moved house, and it was actually on a Friday in September. I remember wondering how on Earth I would have been

able to record Nightmare if it had been on, as all our VCRs (we had four at the time) were buried under sofas, fridges and our cat in my parents' new bedroom. However, Rosey and I managed to take a break from the move by watching Fun House (which had inherited Nightmare's old timeslot) at our aunt's house, and she had a VCR, so I guess it would have been okay.

So, there we have it - some more of my Nightmare Nights. Remember, readers, I want to hear about **your** Nightmare Nights too, so why not drop me a line and tell me about some of them?

REMEMBER HIM?

Series 2. Level 2.

BUMPTIOUS THE DWARF

Bumptious was a fully paid-up member of HoGG, the Honorable Guild of Goldminers, and he was proud of it. Although quite tall for a dwarf, Bumptious was typical of his race in that he liked immense amounts of gold, and he seemed to spend practically all of his time mining for it in level two, in the chamber that would later become the entrance to level three, complete with the minecart, although obviously it was stationary in this series. With his gruff northern accent and stick-on beard, Bumptious was played by Tom Karol, who also played Olaf in this series.

I suppose Bumptious was quite well named - he was certainly very officious, and full of his own importance as a member of the Guild. This meant that he had very little time for anyone who appeared on his mining site who was not a member of the Guild, which included, of course, dungeoneers. Only three dungeoneers wandered into the Dwarf's mine, but they were all subjected to rigorous official proceedings as soon as they arrived. Dungeoneer Chris was lucky enough to be hired as a temporary apprentice, but this arrangement lasted only long enough for him to help Bumptious blow a large exit hole in the wall through which he could leave.

When Neil met Bumptious, he was subjected to an official enquiry, which involved answering three questions about the dwarf race. Although the questions appeared to be fairly simple, the team just about managed to scrape one correct answer. Bumptious was obviously feeling very charitable that day, as he awarded Neil a spell called SHOVEL in spite of his dismal score. And I'm sure I don't need to remind you what happened next...

Bumptious's final appearance was in the last episode of series 2, when he suffered a dynamite-related injury at the hands of Karen, who accidentally landed on top of him from level one and pressed down on his plunger! Gretel was on hand this time to assist Bumptious (whose name she revealed for the first time in this episode) with his official enquiry into the causes of the accident, which again involved three questions being asked, this time about explosives! The team scored two, and Bumptious rewarded them with a spell called FLIGHT, which they

managed to use successfully (unlike certain other teams) to fly across a broken bridge.

I suppose Bumptious is quite a forgettable character, what with his somewhat infrequent, inconsequential appearances. Undoubtedly his biggest role in any quest was to award Neil the spell he needed to defeat Cedric and descend to level three, although of course this encounter did not go according to plan, as we are all well aware. Still, I quite enjoy Bumptious's appearances on Nightmare, even though it's taken me quite some time to get around to writing about them!

Fear Factor: 4 A stickler for the rules, and very crotchety.

Killer Instinct: 2 Get his dander up and he won't let you pass.

Humour Rating: 1 No sense of humour at all, except when Gretel's around.

Oscar Standard: 9 Tom Karol is a master of accents; it's just a shame he's not a little shorter.

KNIGHTMARE LOCATIONS

A Dungeoneer's Journey

These photographs were taken by me, Jake Collins, and scanned by Rosey Collins, in May 2007.

Our bold dungeoneer's journey from London to Norwich begins at Liverpool Street, and takes him through the suburbs of northwest London and Essex, then on through Chelmsford, Colchester, Ipswich, Stowmarket and Diss.

The main concourse at London Liverpool Street:



Below we see Ipswich Station, which is a major railway junction. You can change here for trains to Lowestoft, Felixstowe, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Cambridge and Peterborough.

Underneath Ipswich is a photograph taken at Diss, which is the last station before Norwich. Imagine the feelings of anticipation those nervous young teams must have experienced as they pulled out of this station - next stop, Nightmare! (Of course, there's actually a fair distance between Diss and Norwich, but the fact remains...)



Ipswich



Diss

Next Issue: In Norwich.

THE LIFE FORCE CLOCKS RECONSIDERED

By Jim Waterman

"The Dungeon ahead is an alien place, and so to sustain your progress, a sprite of energy will travel with you. This is its manifestation. It is your own life force, and must be fed with food, which you will find occasionally on your quest."

Three minutes into the opening episode of series one, and already one of the most instantly recognisable features of Knightmare had filled the screen - the life force clock. Throughout the eight series it was to undergo two mild tweaks and two complete overhauls, with mixed results. Presented here is an analysis of the three distinct phases of the life force clock in more depth than is generally considered healthy for anyone...

LIFE FORCE MARK ONE: SERIES 1-5

"This is condition green. The next stage is amber, and on condition red you are in grave peril, for this is no game of numerous lives, here you have only one."

While it would be series two before Treguard delivered this line to each new dungeoneer, the life force clock that most would consider to be the overwhelming favourite was introduced before the first quest had even begun, and after some initial teething troubles, was to stay completely unaltered for the first three series before undergoing a mild change for each of the next two series.

There can be nobody out there in the land of Knightmare fandom unaware of how the original life force clock worked, but far fewer people may have studied it in any detail. No sooner had the life force been recharged with food than the first tiny pieces of metal would fly off the helmet, accompanied by the slow heartbeat of condition green. There would be only six stages of disintegration of the knight's helmet before the first colour change; the final piece would be removed under condition amber. Then the skin would peel off the face in nine pieces of varying size; the background would change to red before the last two of these fell off. Finally, the skull cracked as the jaw was removed, followed by that partially dislodged piece of cranium, then the rest of the skull, with a view straight through the left eye socket, followed by the two eyes rolling away.

David's quest, which would be over before the end of the first episode, contains a massive insight into the workings of the life force clock. For a start, it can be seen in its entirety during his quest; in the first room where the team take an eternity to solve the OPEN puzzle, the clock descends from fully armoured face to six pieces of skin missing; despite it showing varying levels over the next few rooms, the clock picks up at that exact point, six skin pieces down, in the dark room where they perish. Here, we see the rest of the life force sequence as the clock runs out to the eerie music which would be recycled in a level three room later on.

What some watchers may never have realised is the sheer rapidity with which the clock runs down, and the slight disparity in how long each stage lasts; even in this first episode it is possible to trace it. The entire sequence takes only 58 seconds to run from start to finish, with condition green lasting only 16 seconds, followed by 22 seconds of amber and 20 seconds of red. Many will not want to admit it, but this was a serious flaw in the original life force clock; had the clock been constantly left running, David's team would have perished several times over as they laboured to complete the OPEN puzzle - even before the clock had appeared for the first time at the top of condition green, and several times more as they answered Olgarth's riddles. The same is true of every other team that played Combat Chess, or negotiated the Lion's Head and the Lasers, or faced a wall monster... in other words, all of them!

Of course, we all know it was superimposed in post-production, though times when Treguard would trot out such lines as, *"Look at your life force: condition red!"* might have tricked a fair few of us youngsters into believing that the advisors could see it as well. Despite this piece of televisual trickery, *"Hurry, team, you're wasting life force!"* was always used as a quick and easy method to make the team snap out of any daydreams or dithering they might be caught in and get on with the job in hand. As the series progressed, the production team would find ever more clever ways to insert the life force clock neatly into gaps in walls, holes in the floor or any other conveniently-shaped spaces to keep it interesting... and then there were those many memorable times it would fill the screen for a death sequence.

Everyone also remembers that the clock was accompanied by a heartbeat sound which slowly quickened in pace as the life force ran out, matching

the growing urgency to find food. Only the sharpest pair of ears, though, will have noticed the heartbeat getting off to a rocky start. In the complete playthrough seen during David's opening quest, both conditions green and amber were set to a steady and healthy 60 bpm, raised to 75 bpm only as condition red hit and the team perished. Condition amber seemed to be slightly quicker for Maeve, as her team made as much of a hash of the SESAME puzzle as David's team had with OPEN; then, still on amber, it was deathly slow when Mave met the snake. By the third quest, though, it had been sorted out; a calm 60 bpm for condition green, rising to 75 bpm for amber and a more agitated 90 bpm for red. The clock would then stay unchanged until the end of series three, to much retrospective fanfare.

Series four was to feature the first noticeable change to the life force clock. I have no idea why it took the production team so long to deduce that it ran out far too quickly, but at least someone realised the error, and the clock slowed down. A crude comparison using the opening quests of series one and four (timing the second piece of skin falling off!) reveals the clock was now running at half the speed it used to, although the heart rates were still the same as they had been for most of the previous three series. That said, the clock would still have run out in just under two minutes. Eagle-eyed viewers during Jeremy's encounter with the evil-eyed goblin statue in episode 14 will have noticed the clock running at its original speed, to which Treguard exclaimed: *"Extreme energy drain is occurring!"*

Series five saw the final appearances of the original clock. By this stage, its use as a hurry-up device was limited. Series three had given us both skull ghosts and the ominous sound of the goblin horn, both of which could be deployed in an instant should the team be wasting time; in series four, these were joined by pookas. So it seems the life force clock was something of a casualty; when it made its first appearance of the series, *eleven* minutes into The B Team's quest (the first quests of the first three series were all over by this time...) something was wrong. The clock had sprouted an inconsequential red border, but the heartbeat that had helped to create the unnerving sensation of a real life really running out had been silenced. It had now come to the point where the only purpose of the life force clock was to appear whenever there was food in the room, turn green, and disappear again - or for the condition red skull to jump up, usually minus its scrolling red background, when a team died. There was a brief revival of the rapid heartbeat right at the end of Ben's

victorious quest, as he headed back towards Nightmare Castle with Shield in hand (or on arm) just to remind us what it was once capable of - but then it fell silent once again before making its final appearance, less than three minutes into the penultimate episode, only to turn green as Duncan bagged a pineapple. Final dungeoneer Kelly's knapsack would remain empty for the entire duration of her 32-minute quest. It was a tragic end for what was one of Nightmare's foremost icons...

...only for the condition red skull to leap out of its grave for a posthumous performance in series six as January became better acquainted with Sylvester Hands's magic rope!

LIFE FORCE MARK TWO: SERIES 6-7

Series six: a new (utterly awful) title sequence, a new home for Lord Fear, and nearly fifteen minutes into the first episode, as Matt was busy swaggering his way through level one... what's this? A knight walking in the corner with bits of armour dropping off? Where's the face and its coloured background?

As if I was writing for a whole legion of Brollachans, I will not lie to you all; right from the start, the much-maligned Mark Two life force clock was condemned to serve the same purpose that its predecessor had been reduced to, namely to appear when food was present in the room, become a fully armoured knight again, and disappear. And it attracted a lot of criticism; with another of its most recognisable objects consigned to the dustbin of history, was Nightmare becoming too far removed from its roots? And, if there was no threat from the life force running out, why was it included at all?

I can't help thinking that the Mark Two life force clock has taken far more stick than it deserves. For one, it was a great piece of smooth animation, certainly equal to that of the original clock. And it sounded great as well, the steps of the knight evoking memories of the heartbeat of the original, with each piece of armour falling off with a truly satisfying clang. Far more importantly, though, on close inspection I firmly believe it *was* a good substitute for the original, as I will now demonstrate.

For a start, I recently pointed it out as a subject for one of my mistaken memories; that I had remembered it as being a two-stage clock with the armour falling off first to reveal a clothed but unarmoured knight,

followed by the clothes and flesh falling off simultaneously to reveal the skeleton - similar to the original. So, on seeing the Challenge repeats - which were, for the vast majority of the time, my first ever views of series six - I was rather surprised to find the armour falling off to reveal the skeleton underneath, leading me to a further mistaken impression that the clock only took 20 seconds or so to run from start to finish. I couldn't have been more wrong. As Matt made a bit of a meal of bagging a croissant, five pieces of armour fell off the knight, taking 20 seconds. I wondered at this point if I could completely reconstruct the sequence of the Mark Two life force clock - and, were it not for the Challenge logos in the top right corner where the knight usually appeared, if it was possible to capture enough video snippets to make an animation of the entire sequence from start to finish...

The Mark Two clock was shown infrequently enough to make this a tricky but not insurmountable task:

- First up, many appearances of the clock were frustratingly similar. Usually the knight would appear with the legs already exposed, with some of the arms and body armour dropping off, before it was restored with food; the right foot would fall off the instant that the sequence restarted, then it would fade from view. The initial encounter in Matt's quest was a good start, showing the strange order in which the body armour drops off; that was soon sorted out, but the questions over the leg armour remained.
- In all of series six, there are two brief flashes of what would be condition green in this sequence; during Alan's quest, the knight appears with exposed feet but the left leg armour still on. While I'd expected the leg armour sequence to follow the odd sequence of the arms and body (which we see plenty of times) a further appearance in Sofia's quest with the right leg exposed and the left completely covered suggests otherwise.
- It is series seven before the rest of the sequence is seen! The right calf drops for the first (and only) time in episode 1. The right thigh drops only twice: episode 11 (at the start of Julie's quest) and again in episode 13, but at no point are the four steps between right calf and right thigh seen, as the sequence is always interrupted.
- The final throes of the sequence and the collapsing skeleton are seen twice, as Sumayya and Sofia are finished off. Barry narrowly avoids the same fate...

Somebody, somewhere at Broadsword/Televirtual HQ has seen this sequence uninterrupted from start to finish, and I only wish we could. But despite those few missing frames of the knight with his right foot and calf exposed taking a few steps, at least the order in which the fifteen pieces of armour fall off is beyond any doubt. And that order is: right foot (which falls off before the knight takes any steps); right calf; right thigh; left foot; left calf; left thigh; right hand; right forearm; right shoulder; abdomen; left hand; body; left forearm; left shoulder; helmet. Finally, the skeleton turns green and disintegrates.

Now for the all-important timing. There are several sequences in which a large number of armour pieces fall off. The best of these is seen during Chris's quest at the end of series six, where eight pieces of armour drop off in succession. As one piece falls off every fourth step, that's 28 steps (seven four-step intervals, you see) taking 32.7 seconds, i.e. 1.168 seconds per step. It takes 56 steps from the start to the helmet falling off. Thanks to Sofia's unfortunate exit, I timed the sequence between the helmet falling and the skeleton finally collapsing at 7.2 seconds. And so, the total time from start to finish, rounded to the nearest whole second, is 73 seconds. Or, in other words, 15 seconds longer than the original life force sequence of the first three series that we all admired so much. Now imagine, if you will, the potential that my false memory might have had; with twice as many stages to go through, here we would have a life force clock that would take two and a half minutes to run all the way through, which could have been further extended by putting six or eight steps between each piece falling off...

So, maybe the Mark Two life force clock wasn't so deserving of castigation after all. If it had been used more - or, at least, more appropriately, in much the same way as that of the old series - maybe it would have been given more respect. Or, possibly, it could have been that the Mark One clock wasn't as great as we thought - iconic, yes, but fit for its purpose? I've already given some evidence to the contrary on that one. I am sure we can all agree, though, on what is coming next...

LIFE FORCE MARK THREE: SERIES 8

Many aspects of series eight are bound to send long-time Nightmare fans into screaming apoplexy, and its all-new life force clock was only one of those. Never mind whether it was supposed to be a cake or a pie - Tim Child finally did set the record straight that it was a pie - it was, frankly, rubbish. Now, having looked into it as closely as the Mark Two clock, I

conclude that it was totally useless as well.

As I pointed out previously, the pie was all I ever remembered about series eight - which I saw a brief flash of during its original broadcast - and, like the walking knight before it, it had given me a mistaken memory. Before watching Challenge's repeats I was somehow convinced that as each section disappeared it was accompanied with some kind of chomping noise. I refused to elaborate much further in my previous article, as I have saved the ugly truth for this one.

I watched series eight from start to finish, carefully noting each appearance - which, as in the previous three series, would only ever be when there was food around. Though there wasn't much scope for animation, being that a pie is an inanimate object, I was convinced that the segments of pie would be seen to disappear as the life force ran out. Not a bit of it! Over the ten episodes, the pie made seventeen appearances; usually it would appear between 3/8 and 5/8 full, the dungeoneer would pick up the food, and it would be restored to a full pie with a brief pinging noise - interestingly cycling back through each of the segments as opposed to appearing instantly full, the way its two predecessors had done. But - and this is a big but - on precisely none of those occasions did the pie ever *decrease* in size. So, although I could confirm that there had never been any chomping noises - mainly because no segments ever disappeared - there was no way of knowing how long the clock would have taken to run out. That would have involved it staying visible long enough for *two* segments to disappear - highly unlikely given that there were only eight of them. That really shows the dreadful design of the Mark Three life force clock - only eight transitions from start to finish, compared with fifteen for Mark Two and twenty-one for the original.

Why did they do it? Who thought that was a good idea? As far back as the last quest of series five, it was clear there was no pressing need for the life force clock anymore - if they had to have one, for instance to keep some kind of link with the Nightmare of old, surely there was no harm in sticking with the vastly superior Mark Two clock. Equally, there are strong arguments that series eight could even have done away with the life force altogether. And on the evidence of the Mark Three clock, that's exactly what they should have done.

I will end this section with a small piece of trivia. What do you think

happened to the Mark Two life force clock during series eight? Its sounds, at least, were recycled. A couple of scenes in the seventh and eighth episodes contained footsteps that sounded remarkably like those of the walking knight... and if you listen carefully any time a skeletron is disintegrated, there's a familiar clang in there as its sword hits the ground.

LIFE FORCE MARK FOUR: SERIES 9?

I can no longer be sure how much of the Knightmare VR pilot I've seen. In a two-minute clip on YouTube a gargoyle appeared, leading the pixellated Treguard to comment, *"Life force is being drained by Despair"* but the clip cuts off before any life force clock is shown. A look at the Bother's Bar review strongly suggests that the (mercifully brief) thirteen-minute pilot contained no life force clock in any shape or form. (This can be found by visiting <http://www.bothersbar.co.uk/weekendspecials/knightmarepilot.htm>)

Were the mythical ninth series ever to happen, whether in the VR format or the original (and I know which I'd go for), the life force could either be removed completely or given a fourth incarnation... and who knows what they might use for that? Obviously, they could go back to one of the old clocks. Only an utter clot would choose the pie; and while I have a strong temptation to give the walking knight a proper stab at doing the job it was quite cruelly denied, surely the ideal solution would be to recreate the original, but give it a twenty-first century makeover. Nothing too dramatic, as it should be clearly recognisable, but enough to be a fitting tribute to the original because, despite the way the original clock ended its days in series five (in a similarly pitiful fashion to Merlin's final scenes in series four), that is the one that will always generate the strongest and most favourable memories.

KIDS' TV SHOWS I GREW UP WITH

Kids' TV of the 1990s III

By Rosey Collins

Earthworm Jim (1995-1996)

This was a tremendously fun little cartoon adapted from a rather bizarre video game - or I assume it was bizarre, going by the cartoon. *Earthworm Jim* ran for two seasons and starred, of course, Jim, a giant earthworm whose super-suit gave him superpowers; his loveable comic sidekick Peter Puppy, who turned into a huge salivating monster and very amusingly tried to eat Jim whenever he was in pain; Princess What's-Her-Name, a giant humanoid insect from the planet Insectika with whom Jim was infatuated; and all manner of hilarious super-villains that I shall get onto in a moment. The first season also featured Snot, a little green blobby thing that didn't talk and lived in Jim's super-suit, somewhere near his portable space rocket (very funny visually). However, Snot was not a very engaging character, and made no appearances in season two.

Jim was voiced by Dan Castellanetta, which I have to say gave a Homer Simpsonsque quality to his stupidity. Peter had a lot more idea of what was going on than Jim did, but unfortunately he was not a skilled fighter. The Princess, of course, being a modern woman, was courageous, skilled and very on the ball. One of those super-villains I mentioned was her evil twin sister, Queen Slug-for-a-Butt, who looked very much more like a giant bug than her sister did. Also fighting on the side of evil were Psy-Crow, a giant crow thingy from outer space; Professor Monkey-for-a-Head, an evil genius with a monkey grafted to his head; and Bob the Killer Goldfish, a goldfish (no, honest) who wanted to take over the universe. He was particularly hilarious, and I wish I could go into detail about all of them; but as it is I've decided to pick just one, my absolute favourite: Evil the Cat.

Evil had a comic appearance, a funny voice (Gil from *Frasier*, actually) and was essentially Evil Itself. Any cat owners out there will know why evil in its purest form is a cat. He claimed to have existed since before the dawn of time, and was intent upon destroying the universe by all kinds of very strange means. He often had to obtain some kind of object to do this - a hatpin and a snow globe spring to mind - and usually this object just happened to be in Jim's supposedly secret headquarters, unbeknown to him. Evil's episodes were perhaps some of the most random and silly - which, believe me, is saying something. Season one episodes in particular

are a lot of random events and dialogue that make absolutely no sense at all, but they're tremendous fun nonetheless. Season two episodes are more coherent and slightly less random... but still madly and delightfully silly.

The Boot Street Band (1993-1994)

Why is *The Boot Street Band* like *Earthworm Jim*? Because it's just mad! I once heard that this series was created as an antidote to *Grange Hill*, which understandably scared the wits out of children about to start secondary school. *The Boot Street Band* was a much less realistic but much more fun depiction of secondary school life, which captured children's imaginations by turning the mundane school environment completely on its head.

As far as characters are concerned, it's a bit difficult to know where to start, so I shall start at the top with the headmaster, Mr. Lear. I didn't know then that he was named after King Lear, arguably the Shakespeare character most famous for madness. Mr. Lear was a late-middle-aged man who had a lot of tropical plants in his office, and a strange obsession with bananas. He also had very few teachers under him. A great favourite with me was Mr. Prince; he didn't talk, only barked, as he believed that he was an Alsatian. He even dressed up in a tail and Alsatian's head. One of my clearest memories of this show was Mr. Lear telling two of the students (I'll come to them in a minute) that Mr. Prince was off work looking after his brother, whose tail had been run over by a bicycle. They puzzled over this for a while, as a brother who also believed he was a dog wouldn't feel any pain if his "tail" was run over; and then somebody came to the conclusion that it must have been a real dog that Mr. Prince liked to call his brother.

Those two students were Joe and Michaela, who occasionally interacted with us at home, and were always the two students to go to Mr. Lear's office when he had a problem. They would then take the problem back to their form, which included Ruth, who kind of acted as form tutor; a nerdy type called Eggbert; and a trio of thuggish lads who had transferred from another school in the first episode. Then, the problem would be solved. One week the problem was needing a new school secretary, which resulted in the students accidentally hiring somebody who *wasn't* completely mad. She was nearly onto the sorry state of the school, and the fact that the students were running it. The only other sane member of staff around was Mrs. Spriggit, your typical self-important, strict yet

comic deputy headmistress; but even she was outwitted by the students at every turn.

Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde (1995-1998)

The title is fairly self-explanatory, to some extent at any rate. Julia Jekyll was a Year Seven student at the Rocket Academy, named for its headmaster, Mr. Rocket. He was soft, stupid, rarely seen without his mother and had absolutely no idea what was going on in his school. In some ways, this scenario is similar to that of *The Boot Street Band*. Add to that Mr. Blister - an evil teacher intent upon the expulsion of our young heroine Julia Jekyll, who constantly outshone his equally evil nieces the Blister Sisters - and you'll see two very similar schools indeed.

Julia, you see, was a child genius. That is why she happened to be brewing chemicals one day that led to her becoming Harriet Hyde: a very big and hairy, but entirely benevolent schoolgirl (played by a man in a funny costume, and voiced by Julia herself) who was useful for scaring the Blister Sisters into backing off. The transformations of course came on at inconvenient times, and Julia was constantly having to run off in the middle of something, but fortunately she had a friend to cover for her: the hilariously named Edward Knickers (Edward, of course, being the name of R.L. Stevenson's original Mr. Hyde). One of the delights of the show was that Harriet Hyde was enrolled as a student at the Rocket Academy. Everyone knew her, and Mr. Rocket and his mother would talk about this monstrous girl like they would any other student. But, of course, only Edward Knickers knew that Julia Jekyll and Harriet Hyde were one and the same.

Big Meg, Little Meg (1997-1998)

Speaking of turning into another person at inconvenient times... The two main characters in this CITV masterpiece were thirteen-year-old Megan and her mum Margaret. Megan was growing up and trying to establish her own identity, Margaret didn't really understand her and didn't want her to grow away from her - you know the kind of thing. And then something happened (I unfortunately missed the first episode - something to do with a crystal, I think) that meant the two of them swapped bodies. And it didn't just happen once, like in the novel *Freaky Friday*. Margaret and Megan were hopping between bodies for two whole series.

When the swap happened, we at home were still seeing the character - where Megan had once stood, we saw Margaret, and vice versa - but the

characters were still seeing whosever body it was. I think it worked better that way than if the two actresses (by which I mean the two at the time - Margaret changed between series, and not for the worse in my opinion) had tried to play each other's roles. As it was, we actually *saw* Megan struggling with trying to give a presentation at work, or whatever, and Margaret struggling with teenage life. Whilst it works for the extended body-swap in the *Freaky Friday* films, with the constant chopping and changing in *Big Meg Little Meg*, for the actresses to be playing two roles each would have been too much for *my* adolescent brain at least, and killed some of the comedy.

There were too many hilarious situations to name, but I can give an example. One was a swap just as Margaret was about to go out on a date. Megan was delighted, as she believed that there was hope for her mother and father (they were divorced), and prepared to go on the date as Margaret and sabotage it; Margaret, as Megan, threw a tantrum until she was allowed to go along. Hilarity ensued. There was another instance of a slumber party, where the swap occurred just after Megan's bimbo American cheerleader friend Samantha asked, "Do you like D.C. more than me?" Margaret arrived to her demanding a yes or no, she picked yes - you get the idea. D.C. was Megan's nerdy and extremely camp friend, who was mostly there to get confused and provide some extra comedy when a body-swap occurred.

Megan had a younger brother, Freddie, who was in on the secret. Well, he had to be, as he was living with them. A younger brother provides yet another similarity to *Freaky Friday*. It's impossible not to compare the two, particularly as they have not only near-identical events but also the same message at heart: girls would have more patience with their mothers, and vice versa, if they just understood them more. But it wasn't preachy, and the main point of the show was to make us laugh, which it certainly did for me.

PUZZLE PAGE TWO

Treguard's Death Quotes IV

I'm sure you remember this one - which dungeoneer's death is Treguard portending or reacting to in each quote?

1.) "You're out I'm afraid, boys, but then again, at least you're off this Dungeon roundabout."

2.) "Ooh, nasty! I'm afraid that's the end of your game, girls. Now _____'s feet are on a different path, so I think it's only fair that you should join him."

3.) "Why are you carrying a weapon of so little use to one who's blindfold? Where is the horn to bring down the Walls of Jericho?"

4.) "I think we should draw a veil over this scene; it's enough for you to know that _____ is no longer with us."

5.) "Ouch! Well, we always knew Cedric would clobber someone sometime. I'm afraid you've dealt yourselves out, team, by failing to deal with magic. The spell you were given was SHOVEL, not SPADE - how would you like someone to get your name wrong?"

6.) "I don't think _____ survived that fall, team. At least, not in this adventure."

7.) "Ah well, it's a tangled web we weave and unfortunately, you've trapped yourselves right in it!"

8.) "There's no escape down that tunnel on foot, and besides, this chamber appears to be haunted!"

9.) "You dropped yourselves right in that one, team; way back in the clue room, where the bottle labelled POTION was described as POISON. If you can't read labels then you can't read the writing on the wall."

10.) "Ooh, what a terrible mess! Too slow, boys, too slow! Besides, what you needed here was the armourer's gauntlet - it freezes the fuse, don't you know? Well no of course you don't, because you didn't

earn that information from the clue room."

11.) "Oh dear, what a pity; what a bind. _____ appears to have come to rather a ghoulish end. What a shame you didn't collect some magic from Cedric."

12.) "That's the trouble with level three, team - every step spells danger. And there you let _____ take one step too many."

SCANDINAVIAN NIGHTMARES

Jón Þórsteinn Petúrssón, February 2008

DISCLAIMER: Despite the apparent timelessness of this not-so-short story, it is part of an existing series, which has so far contained graphic depictions of extreme alcoholism, drug use, violence, theft, martial arts, animal torture, institutionalisation, church arson, abduction, sodomy, bizarre fetishes, underage sex, fascism, murder, cannibalism... and Cradle of Filth. Please be assured that any references to any of these slightly controversial subjects do not reflect the opinions or beliefs of the author of this piece or the editor of The Eye Shield fanzine, but are used for purely literary purposes to reflect the purely fictional opinions and/or beliefs of the purely (well, mostly purely) fictional characters. **YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!**

"Where am I?"

"You're in a kitchen, and there's a girl dressed in white, standing by the stove," Håkon told Gunnar.

"As ever, a woman's place is..." Xander interrupted. Håkon punched him on the arm on behalf of Helga.

Mellisandre turned towards Gunnar.

"She's looking at you now," Håkon said. "And she's got really big..."

"Cheers for telling me *that* when I'm blinded by this helmet!" grunted Gunnar.

"...HAIR!" Håkon continued. "Curly and ginger. I quite like the look of her. I'll get Helga some curling tongs when we get back to Noholm."

"Hello, dungeoneer!" shrieked Mellisandre, stopping Håkon from finishing his description. "I'm making raspberry tarts for tea... would you like one?"

"Warning, team, your life force is low," interjected Treguard.

"See?" Xander retorted. "Gunnar said that broccoli was poison." Treguard sneered at him. Mellisandre, meanwhile, had bounced up to Gunnar excitedly, and deposited a raspberry tart in his knapsack. The life force clock turned green, and the accompanying heartbeat slowed; Gunnar's didn't.

"Erm... who are you..." Gunnar stammered, continually failing to adjust to friendly female company.

"I'm Mellisandre," she simpered at him. "And this Dungeon's such a horrid place, you're going to need a friend in here. Can I be your friend?"

"Hey, Gunnar, you've pulled!" roared Håkon. Gunnar gulped audibly.

"What's your name, then, young dungeoneer?" Mellisandre squeaked at him.

"Erm... I'm Gunnar... but some call me Hobbit."

"Gunnar? Hobbit? There's some strange names. I've never heard that before... why do they call you Hobbit?"

Gunnar struggled to think of an answer. This was neither the time nor the place to mention grim Norwegian black metal. Or his Tolkien obsession.

"It's because I'm short..." he stammered. "...And I've got hairy feet..."

"Ooh, it's not safe for you in here, then," Mellisandre answered. "If you've got hairy feet then Mrs. Grimwold might mistake you for her husband! She's going blind, you see... and he's a big nasty ogre! Eek! We'd better get you out of here!"

She grabbed Gunnar's hand, and he froze in near-terror. He nearly fell over as one swift yank of his arm led him towards the door...

Gunnar and Mellisandre arrived in the next room. Håkon obligingly described it. "You're in a large room, with four doors in it, a bit like the first room we were in... only it's grey, and there's a trapdoor on the floor." The urge to shout "Berk! Feed me!" fortunately bypassed them all.

"Hooray, you're safe," squealed Mellisandre as she skipped around the room with scant regard for the hazard below her. Finally she stopped, standing right on top of it. "I wonder what might happen here..." commented Øyvind, turning to the camera.

"Now, Gunnar, I've got some important advice for you, so listen carefully," Mellisandre told him. "To find the wellway to level 2, you must aaaaaaaaaaAAAAAARRRRGH!"

Mellisandre's loud shriek was the result of the trapdoor giving way below her.

"Now, who didn't see that coming?" retorted Øyvind to the camera again.

"Problems, problems, team," remarked Treguard. "It sounds like Mellisandre had a vital clue for you."

"Her phone number would have been better!" quipped Håkon. "Well, Gunnar, you nearly scored there, but I suppose we should get you out now... sidestep to your right..."

Gunnar's pulse, which had eased once Mellisandre was out of the way, quickened again as an ominous whirring and clanking of machinery echoed through the room. Øyvind gave another knowing look to the camera. Treguard looked on at the advisors.

"Beware the mindless threat of the Mechanical Warrior."

Gunnar sidestepped where he was told, with absolutely no left/right mistakes despite the urgency of his exit, in a ringing endorsement of the Norwegian school system. The Mechanical Warrior appeared on screen, but was far too slow to catch up with Gunnar's fleeing feet and Håkon's expert guidance.

"Where am I?" Gunnar's question was unhindered by the noise of any chasing threats, animal, mineral or otherwise.

"You're in a room with two exits, and the arch on the left-hand exit has collapsed. There are what appears to be three parts of a glowing disc, with some words on it... and I think I see a pie in the centre of the room."

"Come on, team, you're wasting life force," interjected Treguard, seemingly unaware that the clock was still showing condition green. "There is a magical object in this room, but it's broken up and you'll need to pick up the pieces. First, you need to find food."

Håkon guided Gunnar forwards towards the pie, and was immediately disturbed by the sound of whirring cogs.

"Emergency, team, no time to pick up this spell now, you must get Gunnar out!" yelled Treguard. Gunnar was still standing over the pie.

"Gunnar, I've got an idea. Stand still," commanded Håkon, as the Mechanical Warrior approached.

"Team, you must make your exit fast or Gunnar will perish!" howled Treguard, his agitation getting too high for someone his age.

"And when I say 'now', you have to duck..."

The Mechanical Warrior drew its mace back...

"QUICKLY, TEAM!" bawled Treguard, by now in utter hysterics.

"NOW!" shouted Håkon, at the top of his voice. Gunnar ducked as the Mechanical Warrior swung its mace in that awkwardly jerky way, with such force that it fell over in a heap of twisted metal. Being mindless and mechanical (as opposed to an actor in a costume, obviously) it was unable to get up again.

"Right, Gunnar, sidestep to your left, and again, and again..."

There was a "ping" as Gunnar stepped over one part of the disc. It appeared in the corner of the screen. Håkon guided him to the collapsed doorway, and then back towards where the scorpion's tail would usually be attempting to sting an unfortunate dungeoneer. With all the pieces intact, the disc clearly spelled TRANSFORM, albeit in two lines. With further guidance, Gunnar made his exit in a blink of the no-longer-existent eye shield. Treguard, shaking slightly at the back of the antechamber as if gripped by Mildread's magic in series two, poured himself a drink from a large ceramic flagon marked "Extra Strength Dungeon Juice".

"Where am I?"

"You're on a narrow ledge in a cave, and beyond the ledge there's a pool of squirming maggots. There's someone in the shadows..."

The camera panned in to show, of all people that a Norwegian team could have come across, Olaf.

"Gunnar... there's a Viking in front of you, and not a very historically accurate one at that. His hair's the wrong colour, and he's wearing a horned helmet..."

"I always said the Vikings should have had horned helmets..." Xander interrupted. "There are times when the myth is better than the reality. Such as when we filmed that video..."

He was cut short by Olaf noticing Gunnar. "Lootings and pillagings and pillagings and lootings..." said Olaf in his overly musical not-quite-Norwegian accent. "Stoppings, young man, Olaf is going to be looting you now... come, come... what loot you got for Olaf?"

Gunnar had a sudden brainwave. "Snakker du norsk?" he asked Olaf.

"Norsk? No, the lootings or the pillagings, or the vorns," mumbled Olaf, pointing to the maggot pit with his club.

"Jeg snakke norsk," Gunnar continued. "Fordi jeg *er* norsk. Hva vil du?"

"Olaf is not understanding..."

Gunnar continued to quiz Olaf in what should have been his native language. "Forstår du meg? Jeg ha gull, og en hammer. Ønske du gullet, eller ikke? Jeg vil ikke gir du hammeren. Det er *min*."

Olaf waved his club around. "With the bonkings and the tonkings on the head..." he stammered.

Gunnar continued unabated, and the malice rose in his voice. "Så, du er en viking men snakker ikke norsk? Det er *latterlig*."

There was a pause as Gunnar stared Olaf down, or at least he would have done had he not been wearing the Helmet of Justice.

"Olaf... Olaf will be leaving you now..." stuttered the unconvincing Viking. "Olaf is happy to be looting the other people, the orders is the orders..."

Olaf disappeared, and Gunnar was expertly guided along the ledge, again not coming anywhere near a mishap on the cliff face. Treguard grinned to himself in appreciation.

"Where am I?"

To everyone's surprise, he appeared to be in exactly the same place. At least it was very similar, only the shallow pit of maggots was now replaced with a massive chasm, in which sat an enormous troll.

"Ulrik!" howled Xander at the screen. "What the hell are you doing in there! And get those stupid horns off your head!"

"Ooooooh, hello," the troll said, in that strange electronically-altered voice. "What have we here, then? It looks like a small person. I thinks it's a dwarf."

"In the name of Odin, I think it really is him," commented Håkon.

"I thought we left him in the Man Drowning In The Fjord with five hundred kroner to drink himself into oblivion with?" Xander asked the others.

"It'd cost more like five thousand to knock him out..." grumbled Håkon. "I knew he'd intrude at some stage."

"I told you we should have locked him in a cage," sneered Øyvind.

"I likes dwarfs," continued the troll. "Dwarfs makes a tasty snack before a couple of goblins for lunch."

"Will you three stop arguing?" shrieked Gunnar. "What am I supposed to do here?"

Håkon, for once, failed to answer him immediately, the way he would usually do. He appeared to be humming Swedish lyrics to himself.

"...Griper hård på en mäktig hammar... ut för svaga kristna blod..."

"Do something!" screeched Gunnar, as Håkon whistled to himself. The troll appeared also to be waiting for something to happen.

"...Trollhammaren!" Håkon shouted.

"USE THE HAMMER!" Xander and Øyvind chorused in unison. "Throw it at the troll!"

Gunnar obligingly flung the hammer towards the troll; it connected with a satisfying *tonk* noise, and the troll fell over backwards into the dark. Håkon started to guide Gunnar out of the cave.

"That was easy, really," grunted Xander.

"See, I always told you that Finntroll CD would come in handy one day..." Håkon replied, as Gunnar disappeared into the next room with a mighty whoosh.

"Where am I?"

"You're in what appears to be a witch's cave. There are no exits..."

"Are you sure?"

"Serious. There's a cauldron boiling in the middle, and a witch sitting beside it..."

"Caution, team," Treguard interrupted. "This is not who I expected it to be. In this phase the Dungeon has attempted to recreate a previous incarnation of itself... though some anomalies have managed to slip through the net, and this is one I had not foreseen..."

The witch jumped up from her stool and launched herself at Gunnar. "Eh?" she screeched at him. "What you got fer 'Eggatty, then, eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh?..."

"One of you make her stop!" howled Gunnar. "It's unbearable! This is more like an annoying yapping dog than a witch... do something, quick!"

Håkon rose dramatically from his seat and raised his arm in the style of a Shakespearian orator. "Spellcasting!" he boomed, as Xander and Øyvind looked on almost contemptuously at his Hordriss-rivalling pomposity. "T-R-A-N-S-F-O-R-M!" The jangly spell noise sounded, and in a flash, Heggatty was silenced and transformed into Mildread, who let out her trademark shrieking cackle.

"What's Helga doing on the screen, Inc?" Xander asked him. Håkon's reply was a sharp clip round Xander's ear.

"I'm Gunnar... and I'm looking for a way out, actually... into level two?"

"Now hang on a minute!" barked Gunnar. "I helped you by bringing you back here, the least you can do for me is turn this cauldron into a well!"

"Team, if you want to get into level two, maybe you should... make a wish..." Treguard hinted, with that knowing look on his face that he was handing them the answer on a silver plate. Although it wasn't quite as blatant as in series seven.

"Ooooh!" shrieked Mildred. "What have you done to my cauldron? *thrrrrp* How am I supposed to make dinner in that? *thrrrrrrp* No bat and deadly nightshade stew for poor old Mildred tonight... *thrrrrrrp* Go on then, now you've made the well... get in there!"

"And don't you go holding your nose in there!" Håkon commanded him. "You know there's no water in it, right? And it's probably only as deep as Mellisandre. No innuendo intended."

***** END OF PART TWO *****

POETRY CORNER

To those of you who throw away (or preferably recycle) the information leaflets inside boxes of aspirin, and to those of you who discard the instructions with nary a glance when assembling a bookshelf from Argos, may the sorry tale of Richard, Rebecca, Angela and Rowena teach you the error of your ways.

Richard and his girls from Berks
Came in search of Dungeon larks.
In the tunnels, dragons snap,
But Strange is quite a helpful chap.
In the clue room, scrolls are left,
For those whose heads are not bereft
Of brains, to work out easy clues,
And choose which objects they must use.
The emerald blade was lost, not lent,
And that, with pigeon excrement,
Would take them safely on their way,
But on the table blade did stay!
Rich freed Motley from his trap,
Stiletta, though, was quick to snap,
For Richard had no knife to give,
And so he had not long to live.
Without Stiletta's vital clues,
The team was surely soon to lose!
A rune-locked trapdoor barred the way,
And dragon's breath was quick to flay.
Richard got in quite a mood,
As he was promptly barbecued.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

You're In A Room...

- 1.) Vale of Worms. Chris I (Team 3 of Series 2).
- 2.) Hall of Choice. Sumayya (Team 2 of Series 6).
- 3.) Causeway. Sarah (Team 3 of Series 5).
- 4.) Ariadne's Lair (duh!). Dickon (Team 6 of Series 4).
- 5.) Play Your Cards Right. Alex II (Team 3 of Series 7).
- 6.) Sliding Floor Chamber. Daniel II (Team 2 of Series 8).
- 7.) Great Corridor of the Catacombs. Jamie (Team 9 of Series 2).
- 8.) Granitas's Level One Clue Room. *(I wouldn't fancy trying to prepare anything edible in that advisor's kitchen!)* Daniel I (Team 4 of Series 1).
- 9.) Conveyer Belt. Jeremy (Team 7 of Series 4).
- 10.) Place of Choice. Helen II (Team 1 of Series 4).

Treguard's Death Quotes IV:

- 1.) Stuart. (Episode 210.)
- 2.) Richard III. (Episode 801.)
- 3.) Richard I. (Episode 108.)
- 4.) Kelly I. (Episode 309.)
- 5.) Neil. (Episode 209.)
- 6.) James. (Episode 307.)
- 7.) Jamie. (Episode 211.)
- 8.) Cliff. (Episode 303.)
- 9.) Anthony. (Episode 214.)
- 10.) Douglas. (Episode 310.)
- 11.) Claire. (Episode 202.)
- 12.) Ross. (Episode 308.)